

**From:** Roy Seneca/R3/USEPA/US  
**Sent:** 3/6/2012 7:33:47 AM

**To:** Shawn Garvin/R3/USEPA/US@EPA; William Early/R3/USEPA/US; Daniel Ryan/R3/USEPA/US@EPA; Michael DAndrea/R3/USEPA/US@EPA; Michael Kulik/R3/USEPA/US@EPA; Terri-A White/R3/USEPA/US@EPA; Jennie Saxe/R3/USEPA/US@EPA; Stacie Driscoll/R3/USEPA/US@EPA; Joan Schafer/R3/USEPA/US@EPA; Ron Borsellino/R3/USEPA/US@EPA; Kathy Hodgkiss/R3/USEPA/US@EPA; Dennis Carney/R3/USEPA/US@EPA; Gerald Heston/R3/USEPA/US@EPA; Ann DiDonato/R3/USEPA/US@EPA; Trish Taylor/R3/USEPA/US; Helen Duteau/R3/USEPA/US@EPA; Cecil Rodrigues/R3/USEPA/US@EPA; Heather Gray/R3/USEPA/US@EPA; Humane Zia/R3/USEPA/US@EPA; JohnJ Butler/R3/USEPA/US@EPA; capacasa.jon@epa.gov; Victoria Binetti/R3/USEPA/US@EPA; KarenD Johnson/R3/USEPA/US@EPA; David Sternberg/R3/USEPA/US@EPA; Richard Rupert/ESC/R3/USEPA/US; Betsaida Alcantara/DC/USEPA/US@EPA; David Bloomgren/DC/USEPA/US@EPA; Brendan Gilfillan/DC/USEPA/US@EPA; David Polish/R3/USEPA/US@EPA

**CC:**  
**Subject:** Associated Press (3-6) EPA water tests in Dimock, Pa., due this week (FULL ARTICLE)

## **EPA water tests in Dimock, Pa., due this week**

### **Results will give baseline for study of fracking impact**

DIMOCK, Pa. -- The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's testing of scores of water wells will give residents of a small northeastern Pennsylvania village a snapshot of the aquifer they rely on for drinking, cooking and bathing.

The first EPA test results, expected this week, are certain to provide fodder for both sides of a raging 3-year-old debate over unconventional natural gas drilling and its impacts on Dimock, a rural crossroads featured in the Emmy Award-winning documentary "Gasland."

A handful of residents are suing Cabot Oil & Gas Corp., saying the Houston-based driller contaminated their wells with potentially explosive methane gas and with drilling chemicals. Many other residents of Dimock assert the water is clean, and that the plaintiffs are exaggerating problems with their wells to help their lawsuit.

In a letter to EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson, a pro-drilling group called Enough is Enough contends the agency's "rogue" Philadelphia field office has allowed itself to be a pawn of trial lawyers seeking a big payout from Cabot. More than 300 people signed it. "Dimock Proud" signs dot lawns throughout the village in Susquehanna County, one of the most intensively drilled regions of the Marcellus Shale gas field.

The same group recently launched a website aimed at dispelling what it contends is the myth that Dimock's aquifer is contaminated.

Residents who have been clamoring for federal intervention say the attacks on the EPA -- which have come not only from their neighbors but from Cabot and Pennsylvania's environmental chief -- are groundless.

"Since the EPA's investigation began, Cabot and (state regulators) have undertaken a shameless public campaign against the EPA's attempt to rescue the victims who are now without potable water and prevent their exposure to hazardous constituents now present in the aquifer," one of their lawyers, Tate Kunkle, wrote recently. "One would ask why Cabot and the department would oppose the EPA's study of the aquifer and oppose further sampling if they were so sure the aquifer was not contaminated."

## Driller rips 'mistrust'

Cabot spokesman George Stark said the company opposed the EPA testing because it creates a false impression about Dimock.

"It's the notion that there must be something wrong there in order for the EPA to either do testing or to deliver water. I think it causes more concern, more mistrust, more misinformation about the industry overall," he said.

In addition to testing scores of water wells, the EPA is paying to deliver fresh water to four homes where the agency cited worrisome levels of manganese, sodium and cancer-causing arsenic.

Brian Oram, an independent geologist and water consultant from northeastern Pennsylvania, said he is puzzled by the agency's rationale for being in Dimock, since the substances that EPA said it's most concerned about are naturally occurring and commonly found in northeastern Pennsylvania groundwater. By that standard, EPA would have to deliver water to thousands of households, he said.

Nevertheless, Oram supports the EPA testing because it will provide water-quality data the parties can trust, and against which future drilling can be measured.

"It would have been nice if they came out and said the real reason (for the testing) was to put this to bed, find out what's going on ... (and) create a baseline that would allow us to move forward," said Oram, who has looked at the data cited by EPA. "That makes more reasonable sense for why EPA walked into Dimock. If you base EPA's decision on the presence of manganese and sodium and arsenic, it makes no sense."

## Sourcing contamination

The testing will give residents a snapshot of their water. What it won't tell them is how any contaminants found in the water got there.

That's what researchers at Duke University and the University of Rochester, who are conducting their own studies in Dimock, are hoping to pin down.

They are using a technique called tritium-helium dating to pinpoint the age of the water coming out of residential water wells -- in other words, how long it's been since it fell as rainwater and percolated into the ground. Duke researcher Tom Darrah said age dating will help clarify whether contaminants were present before Cabot began drilling the wells, or showed up after drilling began.

Darrah is also testing for methane, the primary component of natural gas. Methane is not known to be harmful to ingest, but at high concentrations it's flammable and, if it escapes into enclosed areas, can cause asphyxiation.

Cabot asserts the high methane levels that its own testing has consistently found in the Dimock water wells are naturally occurring and easily remediated. Stark said nearly 80 percent of the 2,000 Susquehanna County wells sampled by the company over the years had elevated levels of methane prior to drilling.

But state regulators have cited "overwhelming evidence," including chemical fingerprinting, that linked the methane in Dimock's water supply to improperly cemented gas wells drilled by Cabot. The company has plugged three wells.

Moreover, a Duke study released last year found that drinking water wells close to drilling operations in Dimock and elsewhere in northeastern Pennsylvania had higher levels of methane than water wells farther away, suggesting methane migration from gas well sites is a relatively common problem. A follow-up Penn State University study, however, found no such linkage.

Dimock residents Duane and Jen Teel say they've never had a problem with their water, and don't believe that drilling has affected it. Nevertheless, they are eager for the EPA testing to confirm that it's safe for themselves and their two children.

The Teels, who have steered clear of the rancorous back-and-forth that's consumed Dimock, also hope the federal investigation will tamp down the dispute.

"Maybe it'll quiet everybody up," Jen Teel said, "because it'll prove either way that the water was bad or it wasn't bad."

Roy Seneca  
EPA Region 3 Press Officer  
Office of Public Affairs  
seneca.roy@epa.gov  
(215) 814-5567